

*Reflexivity of the 'grey area' of Samoan Vā and continuity of Maui in  
within its Auckland Diaspora*

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*Figure 1. Original drawing of vā diagram*

*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture (Prof).  
The University of Auckland 2023.*

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	3
<i>Abstract</i>	4
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Chapter one</i>	8
<i>The vā in the malae</i>	8
<i>The vā activated through production</i>	11
<i>Chapter two</i>	14
<i>The vā in the fale</i>	14
<i>The passing of Samuelu Folau</i>	14
<i>Maliu (funeral): grieving in the fale</i>	16
<i>Chapter three</i>	23
<i>Whispers of the malu</i>	23
<i>The 'malu' and its origin</i>	24
<i>The grey areas of vā when gifting the malu</i>	27
<i>The malu on me</i>	32
<i>Chapter four</i>	37
<i>Weaving and clashing: an architectural response</i>	37
<i>Fleshing of the vā</i>	43
<i>Conclusion</i>	45
<i>Glossary</i>	47
<i>References</i>	49

# Acknowledgements

*Vivii mea uma I le atua.*

*To the University of Auckland, and the School of Architecture, thank you for the opportunity of academia.*

*To my supervisor, Charmaine 'Ilaiu Talei, thank you for your wisdom, guidance, and compassion throughout this journey. You have been a great mentor, a true blessing.*

*To my grandparents who are forever missed, but always remembered. This is the blessing of your sacrifices and endless love. Thank you, my prayer warriors, my angels.*

*To my Mum and my dearly missed Dad, thank you for lifting me from my lows, and keeping me grounded in my highs. Thank you for the seeds you planted that have come into fruition in abundance for me. Always and forever.*

*To Evander, Freddy, and Larissa, thank you for your love and patience. My forever team.*

*To my village, my family, and friends. Thank you for the abundance of support, my heart is overfilled with your love.*

*All glory to God.*

*Fa'afetai tele lava.*

# Abstract

The architecture of the Pacific has time travelled across oceans and has been translated across Aotearoa New Zealand. Over the last two decades, the scholarship of Pacific architecture has clarified that essential to Pacific spaces are its people, and is more than a tangible presence, but becomes a body of spaces that fluctuate based on the curators of that space.

The thesis navigates how the multifaceted Pasifika-identity, drawing from its conceptual Moana origins and represented within the New Zealand architectural environment. This thesis titled *Reflexivity of the 'grey area' of Samoan Vā and continuity of Maui in within its Auckland diaspora*, examines the depths of Samoan spaces.

By understanding how Samoan people express their Maui through architecture, we start to unravel the complex layers of relationship between self-identity and the spaces that formulate from these identities. Is a building the bridging between what is held within space and the metaphysical realm of the space? Are the walls a simple boundary of the fluidity of vā? Can architecture be curated for the Samoan concept of vā?

Pasifika people are one in spirit, but multifaceted in identity. The representation of Pasifika through architecture within foreign environments is present but evolving. Pasifika architecture exceeds tangible representations and is a holistic accumulation/representation of cultural and spiritual identities of Pasifika people.

It is more than just wood, lashed together. Everything has a purpose, a meaning, which is relational to people. Points that would help navigate this point of view include the evolution of Samoan concept of vā amongst the old, existing, and emerging generations of the Samoan community.

The constant battle between the westernised need for tangible evidence of architecture and the Samoan essence of the intangible vā that is architecture in the Pacific is what this thesis will examine further.



# Introduction

*“The ‘Vā’? As a child, the common Samoan saying ‘Teu le vā’ was always spoken from my mother’s tongue every time the vā was ‘breached’. However, I never understood its weight.*

*Never heard its meaning. Until just recently, well, barely.”*

*Journal Entry, Elena, 2022.*

The vā is a Samoan construct that determines the flow of space. Over time it evolves, yet at the same time maintains its own sense of self. Within Samoan culture, vā is a spatial construct that has been preserved by its traditions and it is commonly understood through the spaces that facilitate Samoan traditions such as Kava ceremonies or Saofa’i, a Samoan ceremony when one receives a Matai, or chiefly title.

Refiti describes vā in its traditional setting as “the organising principle in which things are given their place and relations are forged between people, as well as between people and objects, and space and territory”<sup>1</sup>. As time has progressed, many Pasifika scholars have academically interpreted the Samoan concept ‘vā’ into their own words. Each interpretation helps narrate the existence of vā within New Zealand Samoan communities. The interpretations also provide navigation for the waves of Pasifika identity for Samoan people within the wider diaspora. A few of these interpretations are listed below:

- Albert Wendt’s ‘Unity-that-is-all’. The idea that the vā refers to “the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-all”<sup>2</sup>.
- Sa’iliemanu Lilomaiva-Doktor highlighted how vā fluctuates through Malaga (travelling) and fa’alavelave (obligation), saying “vā remains a moral imperative that strongly influences ongoing relationships among Samoans as they move. Vā is a way of thinking about self, identity, and place”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture* 17.

*Figure 2. Original photography of projects that aimed to capture the multifaceted identity of Moana people in Auckland.*

- Karlo Mila-Schaaf refers to vā as “a site of relationships, a conceptual glue which makes all other principles subservient to this greater idea”<sup>4</sup>.
- Melanie Anae uses the common Samoan expression ‘Teu le vā’ - ‘Nurture the relationship’ - as she describes vā as providing a “significant contribution to highlighting the need to ‘tidy up’ the physical, spiritual, cultural, social, psychological and tapu ‘spaces’ of human relationships in research praxis”<sup>5</sup>.
- Albert Refiti describes how vā “outlines and gives structure to relations for Samoans; how relations give rise to social order; how social order becomes compartmentalised into parcels or territories”<sup>6</sup>.

A constant of vā is that it is relational, as it works to connect individuals and it constructs spaces within time. The vā is an active agency and, an organic system that engages and retracts within space, and links one to another. This personification of vā is a natural response on my account, for it validates that vā is a live entity and can be activated. But the vā not only constructs time, reality, and relationships, but is constructed by the entities in the space. Vā is susceptible to its conductors. Vulnerable to change, the vā reflects the conductors within the space. A primary question arises - what does the vā look like, then, when performed by a variety of conductors with multifaceted Samoan identities and architecturally what does this space look like?

This thesis explores the fluidity of vā, described as the ‘grey area’ of vā in this research, and its realisation within spaces of the Samoan diaspora in Auckland, New Zealand. An overall objective of this research is to understand the fluctuations of the vā amongst the multifaceted Samoan community or individuals within Aotearoa New Zealand and how Samoans across the diaspora conduct the vā around them in response to their new contexts, demonstrating the ‘grey area’ of the vā. The grey areas of vā are not fixed because its vā is susceptible to its conductors. Due to moments of displacement, cultural change and negotiation, the grey areas of vā emerge. Case studies of these fluid forms of vā activation are discussed in this thesis and an architectural review of the grey area of vā from my own lived experience as a Samoan living in the Auckland diaspora.

Given the relational quality of vā, I also engage the Samoan concept of maui which refers to one’s soul or spiritual essence and is defined in this thesis as the inner essence. Samoan political leader Tui Ātua Tupua Tamasese Efi describes the source of life for the soul is the harmony of two spiritual

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<sup>4</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 6.

processes; anapogi and moe manatunatu. Anapogi refers to the rituals of the evening<sup>7</sup>. A ritual of self-denial, entailing on self-isolation from the village and meditating for spiritual insight. Moe Manatunatu refers to the dream dialogue with ancestors and family gods available to, depending on the spiritual levels attained in their processes of anapogi<sup>8</sup>. Efi explains the importance of harmony between anapogi and moe manatunatu, saying:

Through both moe manatunatu and anapogi, the soul is fed. Both invite self-reflection and re-assessment, not only of the contexts of today, but of yesterday and tomorrow. Spiritual insight assists in the achievement of mental and physical harmony. Through the harmonies of body, mind and soul, the self-searches and achieves levels of spiritual harmony or personal peace.<sup>9</sup>

Mauli is the harmony between anapogi and moe manatunatu, resulting in the inner essence of oneself. Through the grey areas of the vā, the two spiritual soul sources, anapogi and moe manatunatu, are being shifted. My thesis revolves around the Samoan word *mauli* to locate an understanding of how Samoan people express their inner essence through the 'grey area' of the vā in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

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<sup>7</sup> Efi, *In search of harmony: Peace in the Samoan indigenous religion*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Efi, *In search of harmony: Peace in the Samoan indigenous religion*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Efi, *In search of harmony: Peace in the Samoan indigenous religion*, 13-14.

# Chapter one

## The vā in the malae

In this part we consider the variations of vā fostered within the ‘malae’ to develop a conceptual framework for the research findings. Malae is the open area often found in front of the faletele (chiefly meeting house or the guesthouse)<sup>10</sup> in Samoan architecture. However, within this research, the malae is reinterpreted as a conceptual space that holds the stories of the Samoan diaspora. Recognizing that the vā is a Samoan concept, and examining how vā is constructed within Aotearoa holds space for overlaps of culture, individuality, and self-identities for Samoan people.

The common research overlap recognised within Pasifika academic conversations about the Samoan diaspora is their way of life as New Zealand born Samoans. Through the migration of Samoans to Aotearoa, a sort of symbolism of the Samoan leaving the faletele to make place within the malae occurs. Far enough to gain the status of “having left”, but close enough to maintain the connections of their origins. This leads me to the thought of displaced peoples. Displaced people typically refer to “a person expelled, deported, or impelled to flee from his or her country of nationality or habitual residence by the forces or consequences of war or oppression”<sup>11</sup>. However, in this thesis, displacement refers to the ‘out-of-place’ social stance Samoan people in Aotearoa may be in, a result of the barriers of the migration of Samoans to Aotearoa. I argue that the displacement of Samoan people in Auckland exist within variations of cultural/societal environments.

Samoan migration to Aotearoa has brought about new nuances and more commonly, struggles of self-identity amongst its diasporic communities. Samoan academic Lauina Ah Young describes Polynesian presence within New Zealand as being overshadowed by racism and enforced stereotypes, resulting in the ‘othering’ of Samoans within Aotearoa, saying:

It hasn’t always been easy being a minority in a foreign and dominant culture, especially when such negative stereotypes, even among peers, continue to exist.

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<sup>10</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 174.

<sup>11</sup> Webster, “Merriam Webster”.



Polynesians are dumb and lazy  
I wouldn't be seen dead in k'rd - that's where all the blacks hang out But you dont look like a  
Samoan  
I thought all Samoans were fat

Such comments used to make me conscious and shy of being Samoan and I often wished that I could change the colour of my skin so I wouldn't be so conspicuous."<sup>12</sup>

In 'Fofoa-I-Vao-Ese: The identity journeys of NZ-born Samoans', Samoan academic Melenie Anae elaborates on the theme of displacement amongst Samoans within Aotearoa through the struggle of finding a foundation of identity between two cultures - the culture of origin and the culture of the surrounding. Anae explains what the label 'NZ-born' signifies, saying:

Being NZ-born signifies the existence of a unique identity...their preferred language is English although they can tautala NZ-born. They are being brought up through the papalagi education system and are aware of two different knowledge systems which sets them apart from their parents and island-born aiga. They have access to two different lifestyles and oscillate between the two or embrace one while denying the other. They experience identity confusion at not being accepted by Samoan aiga or New Zealanders and adopt coping mechanisms to remain sane. They do not deny their Samoan-ness, and their self-identification is an apology for not being able to tautala fa'asamoa fluently.<sup>13</sup>

The theme of displacement experienced by Samoan migrants in Aotearoa activate the grey area of the vā. By being displaced one does not belong, which lead to new ideas of self-identity and representation that contributes to the grey area of the vā.

However, would there be any displacement if Samoan culture were well preserved within Aotearoa? It can be argued that early notions of the vā are preserved by fa'asamoa. Ah-young describes fa'asamoa as the 'traditional Samoan way...the central force in Samoan life'<sup>14</sup>. The vā within fa'asamoa is very specific and intentional. Fa'asamoa is a strong way of life for Samoan people that is being incorporated as well as contested daily by Samoan people. Samoan academic Tamasailau Sua'ali'i-Sauni writes in *'It's in your bones: Samoan custom and discourses of certainty'* that it is clear how imperative fa'asamoa is within Samoa due to its incorporation within Samoan governance. Refiti describes vā as a political agent, saying:

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<sup>12</sup> Ah-Young, *O Fale O Samoa*, preface.

<sup>13</sup> Anae, *Fofoe-I-Vao-'Ese: The identity journeys of NZ-Born Samoans*, 345.

<sup>14</sup> Ah-Young, *O Fale o Samoa*, 9.

“It works as a principle of interdependence - a unidirectional relationship between matai and dependents, in which one is meaningless without the other.”<sup>15</sup>

But fa’asamoa is not the full way of life for the whole Samoan diaspora. Variations of self-identity penetrate and challenge traditions, and sense of community displacement continue. Samoan academic Sam Manuela examines how language, identity and wellbeing are inter-linked and multifaceted for Pasifika living in Aotearoa, saying:

One could suspect that for Pasifika, being immigrants or descendants of immigrants speaking any non-English language (and therefore minority language) in an English dominant country may mean their ethnic identity is a more apparent and central aspect of identity than it is for Pasifika who only speak English.<sup>16</sup>

Over time there has been an undeniable natural growth and development amongst Samoan people in all perspectives - mentally, spiritually, and physically – as a response to cultural displacement. An example of this can be seen in the evolution of non-heterosexual queer spaces within Aotearoa.

During pre-colonial times, many indigenous peoples (including Samoa) recognized more than two genders within their societies. Non-heterosexual queer people were fully accepted and included in early Samoan society<sup>17</sup>, with individuals that identified as a third gender “many times have been visible and socially recognizable positions within their societies and sometimes are thought to have unique or supernatural power that they can access because of their gender identity”<sup>18</sup>. In Samoa, there were four genders that were socially “acceptable” - female, male, fa’afafine, and fa’amatama. The fluid gender space that fa’afafine and fa’amatama offered created the opportunity for the individual to move between male and female worlds. However, due to Western influences, namely Christian ideologies and its effects on modern Samoan culture, genders beyond the binary system are at times considered unacceptable within Samoan society.

In recent years, the queer community within Aotearoa have become more visible and gradually accepted within mainstream Western society. Within the last 40 years, there has been pivotal legal reforms that symbolise acceptance of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Takatapui, Queer, Asexual, Plus (LGBTQA+) community. Such as The Homosexual Law Reform Act 1986 and The Ban on Conversion Therapy 2021, passed by the New Zealand Government.

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<sup>15</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Manuela, *Maori and Pasifika language, identity, and wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand*, 413.

<sup>17</sup> Iosefo, *If there are no doors in a fale, where do we ‘come out’ of?*, 16.

<sup>18</sup> National History Museum, *Beyond gender: Indigenous perspectives, Fa’afafine and fa’afatama*.

Although improvements have been made, gender discrimination still exists within Aotearoa, and certainly for the LGBTTTQA with Samoan conservative cultures. Responding to the cultural changes and gender replacements queer are finding refuge in others that are also queer.

In response to this culturally driven gender displacement, 'If there are no doors in a fale, where do we come out of?', Samoan academic Joshua Iosefo offers a queer perspective of which speaks on the vā between queer Samoan family members. 'Vā fetū' is described as the space between two stars as well as the space shared (in)between queer Pasifika family members<sup>19</sup>. Vā fetu is influenced by its activators and presents an understanding of how a Samoan spatial construct is interpreted for queer Pasifika people. The creation of vā fetu is a result of survival for queer Samoan people. The 'vā fetu' is a realm of which original indigenous Samoan genders such as fa'afafine and fa'amatama move, respond and reconstruct through space and time. Again, this example highlights the fluidity of the grey area of the vā, as it responds to the historical and diasporic cultural changes of the Samoan diaspora.

#### The vā activated through production

Architectural designs reflecting Samoan identity through the built environment of Aotearoa is a reaction of displacement. Architecture can be considered another vessel to navigate Samoan vā in Aotearoa. Two of the most notable types of Samoan architectural structures are the fale tele (also known as fale lapotopoto) and the fale afolau (also known as fale utopoto)<sup>20</sup>. Fepulea'i Micah Van der Ryn describe these structures as the following:

The fale tele typically has one, two or three central posts (pou tu) holding up the roof at the centre. The floor plan is made from a front and back straight itu (side) at which there are usually three pou lalo (sitting posts) sandwiched between the two large semi-circular tala (or curved ends). The pou lalo are usually placed at intervals of between four to six feet.

Fale afolau - this type of structure is long like a boathouse....The fale afolau is actually created by lengthening the itu (the straight front and back sides) while maintaining the same dimensions to the curved tala (ends). The other name applied to this elongated fale tele is fale utupoto. The

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<sup>19</sup> Iosefo, *If there are no doors in a fale, where do we 'come out' of?*, 48.

<sup>20</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 174-175.

utupoto are tie or cross beams connecting the tops of the inner set of house posts, a structural feature absent in fale tele, which have the so'a (collar beams) instead.<sup>21</sup>

Transporting this knowledge into Aotearoa, and applying it, can be seen through architectural precedents of the University of Auckland's Fale Pasifika, the Fale Tele located at Unitec's Mt Albert Campus, and the Samoan Consulate located in Mangere South Auckland.

The University of Auckland's Fale Pasifika is located on the university's city campus. Built to be a hub for Pasifika communities, Refiti describes the Fale Pasifika saying, "it is apt to see it as a space and 'body becoming' of Pacific identity, with the ability to combine and to gather a new community in the diaspora"<sup>22</sup>.

The Fale Pasifika resembles a fale afolau in its structure, with noticeable alterations to suit its environment. The Fale Pasifika is constructed with bi-folding doors that enclose the fale with the use of steel piles and structural members that are not typical of the types of materials that would be used in Samoa. With the addition of new structural elements that appear as "non-traditional", cultural, and architectural authenticity is questioned. How do the conductors of vā respond to the alterations of the fale structure from its original materials and form? I argue that these alterations are a type of cultural displacement. Pacific artists within Aotearoa have provided modes of expression that work as an addition to the Fale Pasifika. Refiti describes these Pacific Artist works as "reference points that could conceptually stitch together a body becoming"<sup>23</sup>. An example of this is the incorporation of Tongan artist Filipe Tohi's patterned lashing that binds the timber members of the fale. Pacific artistry is not only incorporated within the primary structure of the Fale Pasifika, but also the surrounding, the malae. Refiti states the following describing how this is achieved by saying:

"At the fale pasifika, the surface of the malae (in front of the fale) uses weather map graphics as tiling patterns, linking the idea of the ocean as an undifferentiated ground of identity, and the role of the malae as the sacred ground that brings Pacific people into a relation with their ancestor gods."<sup>24</sup>

The incorporation of Pasifika art adds a form of 'mana' to the altered structure, and provides an insight of how the diaspora express themselves through the 'grey area' of the vā in Aotearoa.

On the other hand, the Samoan Fale Tele found at Unitec was completed using traditional techniques and materials unique to the Pacific (New Zealand timber with Fijian coconut fibre rope

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<sup>21</sup> Van der Ryn, *The difference walls make*, 18-20.

<sup>22</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 24.

were used amongst the said materials)<sup>25</sup>. Along with this, a tufuga fai fale (traditional Samoan master builder) was involved in the process of this construction. This fale tele is symbolic of the fusion of Aotearoa and the Pacific through architecture. As mentioned before, the displacement of Samoan architecture results in adaptation of its design, creating a 'grey area' of the vā in relation to tangible architectural representations.

In summary, vā is a Samoan sociospatial construct that is interpreted over time. Each interpretation can negotiate, resist, disrupt and compliment previous understandings to develop a deeper understanding of what vā is for Samoan people. Indeed, vā not only influences, but is influenced by its Samoan conductors (individuals or communities). When the vā is conducted, the outcome of spaces can appear new and test the unknown. This element of the "unknown" is where we find the 'grey area' of the vā. As Samoans in the New Zealand diaspora foster vā in the malae, the 'grey area' is shaped by the displacement of Samoan people, either by ethnic marginalization, or clash of 'traditional' cultural norms, and contesting gender norms. Untangling multifaceted Samoan identities due to migration and the idea of vā fetu amongst queer Pasifika community are just some of the existing concerns that emerge from the grey area of the vā. This is the grey area we will take forward further into this research. Such displacement questions the generalisations of Samoan identity experienced by the diaspora. Architecturally, the result of this displacement is the expanding of new spaces made for Samoan people by Samoan people (the notion 'for the people, by the people').

The review of vā relations within the wider Samoan diaspora in Aotearoa discussed in this introductory chapter provides a theoretical framework for the next chapters. Chapters two and three, which present narratives of the two events of personal experience of the grey area of vā. The first event revolves around the passing of my father, Li'omatua Tuilaepa Samuelu Folau in 2018. The second event revolves around the gifting and receiving of the Malu, a traditional Samoan Tātatau that I had received in 2022. These events represent significant turning points within my lived experiences and reflect a 'coming of age' Samoan teine born and raised in South Auckland, New Zealand. My thesis finishes with an architectural discussion of a grey area of vā that I have designed to capture the maui spatial realities of its conductors.

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<sup>25</sup> UNITEC, *Fale a New Zealand First*.

## Chapter two

### The vā in the fale

*Hugging a memory is better than nothing Feeling my arms wrap around a familiar temple*

*Pulling towards my heart desperate to pull you back to my present*

*Hearing a memory is better than nothing My ears fell to the comfort of your voice But my voice echoes in  
search for reason*

*As my tone trembles over the words 'I miss you Dad'*

*Seeing a memory is better than nothing*

*The number of times I've dreamt about you*

*Now I sit here hoping*

*Hoping my dreams come true*

*Poem Entry, Elena , 2020.*

The vā in the fale now refers to the vā that directly relates to me - the vā in my fale. Here I investigate how Samoan culture is negotiated and displaced in the event of the passing of my father. The displacement that occurred during my father's passing was the fact that I had become a daughter without a father, my mother without her husband, my grandparents without their son. The displacement of grief and a vā that was lost. Through the following diagrams I portray the vā interrogated by this displacement through line vibrations, curves, and pinched moments.

### The passing of Samuelu Folau

*"I don't know if I've healed enough to talk about this. Although time is doing its best, it sure is taking its time.  
But this is part of my truth. Maybe you are the design, or the design is within you. Time will tell when it clocks  
in."*

Every family has that one member who keeps the wheels turning. Who makes sure the car is warmed up before each trip, with the oil and coolant is good to go. A member who boils the jug to defrost the windows of the car on an audaciously cool morning. Who pots around the house making sure everything is within its space of purpose. Who plans their day around what is on the agenda of



their other family  
my dad.

Figure 3. Me and Dad

members. For me, that family member was

Li'omatua Tuilaepa Samuelu Folau. A hard working, Samoan who migrated to Aotearoa in the 1960s with his parents and younger sister. A devoted eldest son, a loving husband, the greatest dad, and a dear friend to most. It is with a broken heart that I write that August the 14th, 2018, he had unexpectedly passed away. Within this research, an examination of the spaces after his passing, the Maliu and how the Maui of my father and our responses as conductors with the physical spaces of my fale influenced the vā, unveiling the 'grey areas' of a fale and my Samoan family.

The passing of my father happened amid an unexpected space in time. My immediate family were travelling back to Aotearoa from my maternal grandfather's funeral in Brisbane, Australia. My siblings and I travelled back ahead of our parents, with our parent's due back in Aotearoa less than 48 hours later. However, 48 hours was the last of my father's hours. And he passed away in Brisbane. An insert of my siblings and I receiving the news are as follows:

*A frantic knock jolted my eyes open. Someone is at our door? Took a glance at my phone, it was 5am and I had missed calls from my mum accompanied by a text message, 'Elena are you awake?' with the timestamp being 3:25am.*

*Why is mum trying to contact me at this time? She knows it's 3am here and not midnight like where she is in Brisbane.*

*I reverted my attention to the continuous knock on my front door. I rushed to the door, still waking up on the way. I peek through the window to see who it is. What the hell, I thought to myself as I opened the door to my Mums brother, Uncle Paul.*

*"Hi Uncle" "Hello dear, can you please wake your siblings up" "Sure, come in".*

*This is weird, I thought to myself. He walked in and to my surprise was followed by some of my cousins and Aunties. I woke my siblings saying,*

*"Uncle Paul and them are here, I don't know why, come down now".*

*I then went back down to host our guests in my pyjamas, rushed brush teeth, and messy bun. Everyone was sitting in the lounge except for one couch.*

*"They're coming Uncle" "Okay dear, you sit there and your siblings can sit with you" he said as he pointed to the unoccupied couch.*

*It was silent until we all occupied the oddly vacant couch.*

*"Hi sis, they're all here" said my Uncle to his phone. He turned and faced the phone to us where we were met by our Mum.*

*"Hi mum" "Hi kids" .... "Kids...I need you to be strong okay."*

*Where's Dad? "Kids...Dad is gone"*

*Where's my Dad*

*"I'm so sorry my kids, I love you"*

*The moment of bad news, Elena, 2022.*

Maliu (funeral): Grieving in the fale



Grief is a companion in life that is unwanted but inevitable. No matter who you are, we have all had a relationship with the companion of grief. And in relation to navigating the spaces around grief, a question rises and becomes imminent - How do we foster a vā that is lost?

The tangible spatial realities of the passing of Dad were, one: his physical self was to be transported from Brisbane to Aotearoa and into our domestic realm; two: our domestic fale will now become a host to many; three: family dynamics were to be navigated; four: the incorporation of fa'asamoa rituals for funerals - to what extent will this be considered?

As the proceedings continued, we will examine how each of these expectations of spatial realities unravelled throughout the processions, and how any displacements or alterations resulted in a 'grey area' of the vā.

Many "firsts" were activated when my father passed away. He was the first son to pass, not only this but first to pass on foreign soil. First to be transported back from overseas. And first for my father's family to not follow their family protocols. When my mother came back with my dad, my dad's parents, Nana Siulepa and Papa Li'omatua agreed for my dad to spend his final days on earth side with my mother under her (our) domestic realm. My mother explained to me later that the usual protocol is for the birth family of the deceased (prior to marriage or any companionship) to take the physical self under their domestic realm during their final days before the burial. However, my father's family, in particular my Nana Siulepa, recognised the significance of my mother and my siblings and I within my father's life, saying "Sam loved them, so they can take care of him these last days' ".

Our domestic realm was transformed, resulting in our household becoming a type of hub for family and friends to gather and mourn. The maliu's "focal point" was arranged in the lounge, from which everything else flowed around this centre. The focal point was where my father's physical self would lie during the last days before the burial. The focal point was visible from every point of the fale. Every chair was arranged to face the focal point. Every flow of path was directed towards focal point. Outside there were three marquees. One for an extended kitchen, and the other two provided an extended gathering space for the overflow of people visiting the maliu. The outdoor area was less tapu compared to the indoor area. Partaking in food and casual conversations took place outdoors. Indoors, the vā was activated through spatial rules and ceremonial activities of the maliu, like prayers, Christian worship singing, and the delivery of formal speeches.

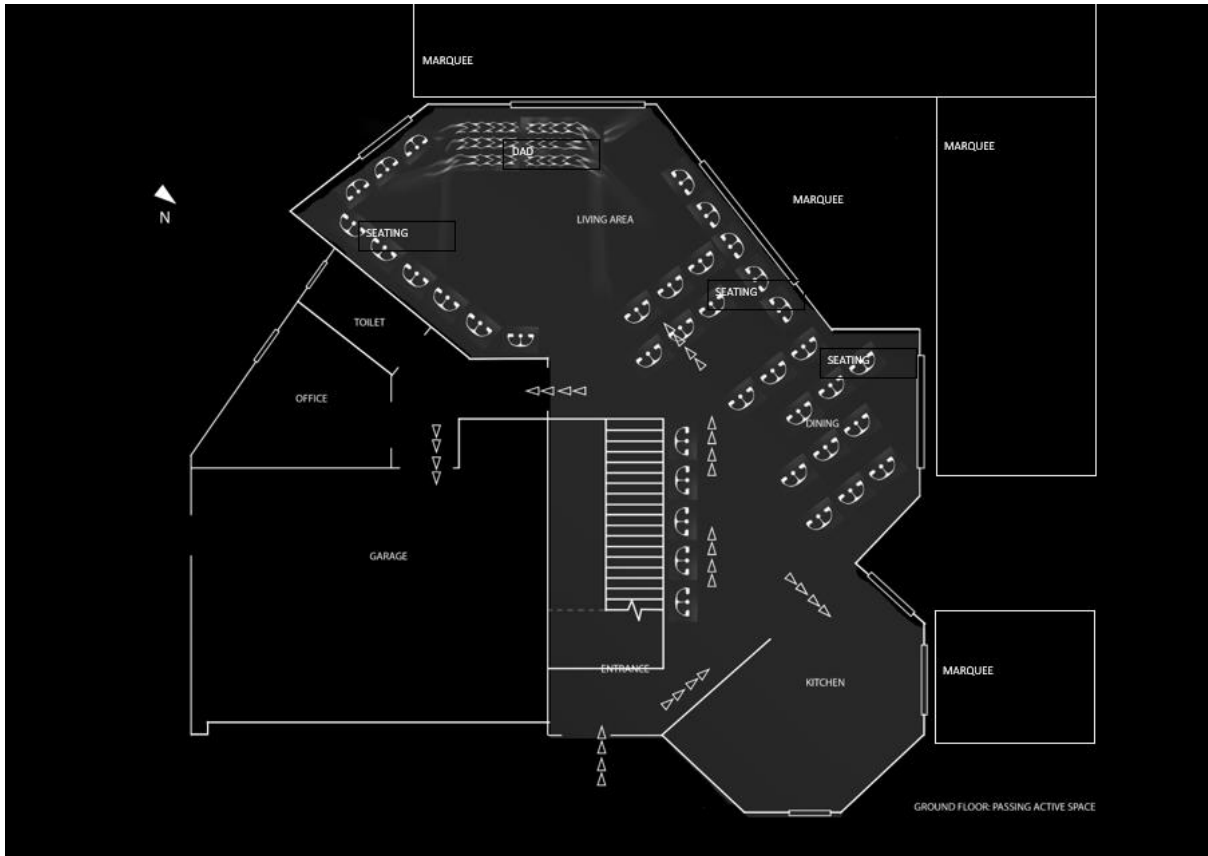


Figure 4. Diagram of transformed domestic realm when grieving in the fale.



Figure 5. Samuelu's body in the lounge of the domestic realm

My mother wanted to keep the fa'asamoa practices for a maliu to a minimum. It was to allow my siblings and I (and herself) to grieve in a way that we felt comfortable and safe to do so. My siblings and I cannot speak or understand Samoan language fluently, nor know the "ins and outs" of fa'asamoa protocols, especially within Samoan maliu. So, the element of displacement within our culture was already at work. One of the most recognised fa'asamoa protocol or a cultural aspect throughout Samoa is the ceremonial practice of fa'alavelave (ceremonial practice). The fa'asamoa ceremonial practice of fa'alavelave is described by Samoan academic Yvonne Luta in *Fa'alavelave: A disturbance or a blessing?* as a "central element in the Samoan culture". Luta says:

"It can be understood in two ways firstly it may be referred to as a problem, a small disturbance in routine, or a family crisis for example traditional ceremonies or occasions such as faaipoipoga (wedding), maliu (funeral), or fa'ufalega (blessing of the church) (Maiava, 2001, p.92). There are many other events such as nofo (chief bestowal ceremony) and taga o le pe'a (tattoo ceremony).

The second understanding is that if fa' alavelave roles and obligations are met then one is at peace with oneself and aiga."<sup>26</sup>

We knew that this ceremonial practice was inevitable, but to what extent? This was determined by the activators of the vā (in particular my mother, siblings, and certain members of the extended family).

Luta dissects the effects fa'alavelave on Samoan livelihood within Aotearoa. The main form of a fa'alavelave is through monetary contributions towards a traditional ceremony or occasion, and Luta differentiates the difference of fa'alavelave responsibility that occurs within Samoa compared to Aotearoa, saying:

"Samoans living in New Zealand as opposed to Samoa will have varying experiences. The villages in Samoa will follow strict protocol and thus have a more traditional approach. They will rely on families and remittances to accommodate their fa'alavelave. In New Zealand, when Samoans resort to fringe lenders or loan sharks to meet their fa'alavelave, this can be seen as a problem.

In fact, such borrowing has seen some families in financial debt....In spite of these financial issues, fa'alavelave remains to be seen as an integral part of the fa'asamoa in New Zealand"<sup>27</sup>

The following fa'alavelave typically occur during a maliu (funeral) and are to be fulfilled by the family and friends of the grieving parties involved. The vā within this space activated by individuals who are fulfilling a fa'alavelave are strictly "traditional".

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<sup>26</sup> Luta, *Fa'alavelave: A disturbance or a blessing*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Luta, *Fa'alavelave: A disturbance or a blessing*, ii.

1. The family and friends (extended) of the deceased receive news of the passing and prepare a fa'alavelave for the immediate family of the deceased.
2. The extended family and friends then meet with the immediate family. Most times it is when the physical body of the deceased is within the immediate family's home. If the body of the deceased is not on grounds/or within the country, the immediate family still meet. (Note: these meetings are mostly spontaneous, with a few being pre-planned moments before the arrival of extended family).
3. A gifting of the prepared fa'alavelave (can be money, fine woven mats, or food but is typically money) is given to the immediate family of the deceased prior to the family funeral service. The highest ranking Tulafale (orator chief) of the visiting party announces the fa'alavelave and offers words of comfort for the grieving family.
4. The immediate family receives the fa'alavelave and extends their gratitude toward the extended family and friends through any form of tangible gifts (they can give money back or provide food for the family to partake in). This is also done by the highest ranking Tulafale of the immediate family.
5. The vā within the space is then made noa through a closing prayer, followed by food for everyone.

However, during my father's last days in our fale, fa'alavelave's were almost replaced with Christian praise and worship songs that were sung by our family members and guest every night. My father's physical self was within my mother's home during his final days before the burial, my father's immediate family became visitors of this space. I say "almost" because fa'alavelave's were happening, just not within my mother's home. My father's immediate family hosted the traditional fa'alavelave's within their own home. And my mother did receive fa'alavelave's from family and friends, but this was done with a hug, kiss, and "slip" of money envelopes into my mother's hands. Every night, at 6:30pm, my uncle (Pastor as well) would activate the vā with prayer, following into a song of praise or worship, offering a biblical reflection of comfort, and deactivating the vā with a closing prayer. There were no grand gestures of fa'alavelave's, no speeches from the highest ranking Tulafale.

Outside of these hours of praise and worship songs, the vā with my father's maui was further activated and strengthened through the moments to comfort, pause and reflect on our memories, and feel the pain and sorrows of the maliu.

*I remember the moment my siblings and I calmed our hysteria hours after receiving the news of Dad's passing. We were all in my room. My sisters and I huddled on the bed, my brother lying on the ground, all crying in*

*silence. People were coming in and out, sitting with us, trying to provide comfort with presence, but when I looked into my siblings' red puffy eyes, they were phased out in disbelief.*

*I remember seeing my cousins, on my father's side, arrive moments after my siblings' quiet cries. My cousin held my collapsed body as I wept, her body shaking as she cried silently.*

*Drenched shoulders all around.*

*I remember breaking down hysterically moments before going to bed. My aunty held me in her arms whilst my uncle sat at my feet repeatedly saying 'let out lena'. Both with strong voices, but tears flowing.*

*I remember the days all muddled into one long  
silent cry.*

*Journal Entry, Elena, 2020.*

The displacement within this event is found through the loss of my father, and the loss of vā he fostered and influenced throughout his life. Beyond the fale, a new space emerges that continues to perpetuate the vā with my father's maui. The manukau memorial gardens, or the tugamau (cemetery), where my father's lays today provide further vā connections and the healing of our vā. A space where grief, pain and sorrow are continually revisited and a space that activates healing.

The tugamau, provides a new grey area of the vā for Samoan diaspora, expanded on in my final chapter. The tugamau is a space that extends the domestic fale and recognizes the maui of the deceased which is acknowledged through the grieving family members and friends that visit their loved ones.

The tugamau is the 'other fale' to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, and New Year's, which are just a few occasions that take place at the memorial gardens. This notion of the Samoan vā with their deceased continues in the diaspora, contradicting the "dark, scary and haunted" depictions by Westernised horror films. It is a space to heal, to reflect, to include the lost loved one into your daily life. Headstones are decorated with flags, flowers and colourful lights that light up the entire cemetery.

*"Like Christmas lights in May!"*

*Journal Entry, Elena, 2022.*

In summary, this chapter has presented the various ways the loss of a father in a Samoan family can have on the maintenance of vā within the diaspora. Due to various circumstances, ideas of vā are negotiated, displaced, revisited to honour, grieve, and celebrate the life of a loved one in the fale and beyond to the tu'ugamau. Navigating the lost vā within this grey area of a fusion of old and new

traditions and rituals. As a Samoan family in Aotearoa, the displacement of celebrating a deceased loved one on foreign soil resulted in grey areas of the vā. For the vā in my fale, my mother conducted the grey area of the vā by curating a space that did not follow traditional Samoan protocols or customs. Instead, a space that fostered a variation of healing.

# Chapter three

## Whispers of the Malu

*'Ta ta ta' goes the au  
Each strike paints  
The journey of the receiver  
'Ta ta ta' goes the au  
Stretched to translucency  
Marked by the gifter  
'Ta ta ta' goes the au*

*Reflection Entry, Elena, 2022.*

The malu was never a promise of mine to fulfil. A great responsibility that I thought I would fall short of. A visible indication of my lineage, a lineage I felt unworthy to receive because I did not know my language. The stigma around New Zealand born Samoan receiving the malu was an element that influenced my thoughts around the malu. The malu is a traditional Samoan tatau (tattoo) typically given to Samoan women.

Passing comments such as 'everyone is getting it [malu] without a good Samoan mafaufau (head)' or 'if you don't know how to speak, then don't get the malu' left me feeling inadequate. I questioned myself: '...if I don't possess the ability to speak or understand my mother tongue fluently (yet), so does that mean that I am not worthy of these markings? Am I not simply Samoan by birth? Why do I have to prove the worthiness of my blood? I lived with this perception right up until I was asked by my mother to be her soa (supporter/partner) for the malu.

Losing a parent helped to put everything into perspective. When the only parent you have left asks you to partake in a monumental moment that could never be repeated, I had to consider! Life was too short to live by the thoughts of others. Let alone, the thoughts of my doubtful self. Suddenly, the sense of self inadequacy faded as the opportunity to strengthen the bond with my mother.

*When you realise how big the universe is,  
you cannot help to acknowledge how insignificant you are.  
So just do it.*

*Reflection Entry, Elena, 2022.*

Before I present the events of my malu, I begin by examining the female Samoan tatau, the malu (also known as the la'ei) and its origins.

### The malu and its origin

Pese o le Tatau

O le mafauaga lenei ua iloa

O le taaga o le tatau i

O le malaga a teine to'alua

Na feausi mai Fiti le vasa loloa

Na la aumai ai o le atoau

ma sia la pese e tutumau

Fai mai e tata o fafine

Ae le tata o tane

A o le ala ua tata ai tane

Ina ua sese sia la pese

Taunuu i gatai o Falealupo

Ua vaaia loa o se faisua ua tele

Totofu loa lava o fafine

Ma ua sui ai sia la pese

Fai mai e tata o tane

Ae le tata o fafine

Talofa i si tama ua taatia

O le tufuga lea ua amatalia

Talofa ua tagi aueue

Ua oti'otisolole au tapulutele

Sole Sole, ai loto tele

O le taaloga a tama tane

E ui lava ina tiga tele

Ae mulimuli ana ua a fefete

O atu motu uma o le Pasefika

Ua sili Samoa le ta'taua

O le sogaimiti ua savalivali mai

Ua fepulafi mai ana faaila

Aso faaiifo, faamulialiao

Faatualoa, selu faalaufao

O le sigano faapea faaulutao

This is the origin we know

Samoa Of the tattooing of the tatau in Samoa

A journey by two women

Who swam from Fiji across the ocean

They brought the tattooing kit

And their unchanging song

That said women were to be tattooed

And not men

But the reason why men are tattooed

Is because their song went wrong

Reaching outside Falealupo

They saw a giant clam

The women dived

And changed their song

To say men were to be tattooed

And not women

Pity the youth now lying

While the tufuga starts

Alas he is crying loudly

As the tattooing tool cuts all over

Sole, sole, be brave

This is the sport of male heirs

Despite the enormous pain

Afterwards you will swell with pride

Of all the countries in the Pacific

Samoa is the most famous

The sogaimiti walking towards you

With his fa'aila glistening

Curved lines, motifs like ali

Like centipedes, combs like wild bananas

Like sigano and spearheads



This well-known Samoan song describes the legend of the two female atua, Taema and Tilafaiga (the Siamese twins). It is said that Samoan tatau began in Fiji and with a chant that went wrong during the Siamese twins' travels from Fiji to Samoa. Wendt explains the legend, saying:

Taema and Tilafaiga, originally Siamese twins, who went to Fiji and learned the art of tatauing. They left Fiji with an atoau, a basket of tatauing implements, and the belief /practice that the tatau was for women, not men. However, as they were swimming past Falealupo at the westernmost tip of Savaii, they sighted a giant clam in the ocean bed. They dived for it, and when they surfaced, their song changed to, 'Faimai e tata o tane, ae le tata o fafine.'<sup>29</sup>

Over time, the practice of Samoan Tatau has been preserved in certain families of Samoa — the Aiga of the Tufuga (families/guilds of artists and craftspeople). Some of the most notable Aiga of the Tufuga Tatatau were Le Aiga Sa Su'a (Upolu) and Le Aiga Sa Tulou'ena (Savaii). These aiga have preserved the practice of traditional Samoan tatau through generations. Members of these families also taught tatau through an apprenticeship system. Naturally, the practice was shared amongst descendants and other Samoans.

Although the practice of Samoan tatau has been preserved through time, the practice almost became extinct due to colonialism. Wendt describes tatau as being a form of defiance against colonialism, saying:

Samoa was one of the few places where tatauing refused to die. Tatau became defiant texts/scripts of nationalism and identity. Much of the indigenous was never colonised, tamed or erased.<sup>30</sup>

Like many other aspects of Samoan culture, tatau is a way of life and part of everything else (the people, aiga, village, community, environment, atua, cosmos)<sup>31</sup>. The word 'tātatau' like many Samoan words, has layered meanings.

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<sup>28</sup> Wendt, *Tattooing the Post-colonial body*, 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> Wendt, *Tattooing the Post-colonial body*. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Wendt, *Tattooing the Post-colonial body*. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Wendt, *Tattooing the Post-colonial body*. 5.

1. ta - to strike, referring in this case to the rapid tapping action when tatauing.
2. tau - to reach the end, to anchor/moor a boat or canoe, to fight. So, ta plus tau could mean 'let's fight, ' let's go to war,' or 'striking' until we reach a conclusion.
3. tatau also means appropriate, apt, right and proper, balanced, fitting.
4. tata - to strike repeatedly (Each tufuga tātatau has his own rhythm, each person being tātaued works out a rhythm to combat/withstand the pain)
5. u - to bite or is the sound of suppressed pain as you clench your teeth to try and withstand the pain.
6. tatau - also means to wring the wetness/moisture/juice out of something.<sup>32</sup>

The language on its own is an indication of the complex layers that make the fabric of the vā involved. The depth of receiving a tatau extends beyond the novelty of “beautiful skin decor”, for the markings represent the vā between the Tufuga (Tattooist) and the receiver of the markings and the significance of the markings. Wendt describes the analogy of the tatau markings as being clothing, saying:

Tatau for men and the malu for women were considered ‘clothing’, the most desired and highest-status clothing anyone could wear. The malu was essential wear for women before they married. Clothed not to cover your nakedness but to show that you are ready for life, for adulthood and service to your community, that you have triumphed over physical pain and are now ready to face the demands of life, and ultimately to master the most demanding of activities - language/oratory.<sup>33</sup>

A common theme that emerged across the chosen texts was the defiance of the common normality of the traditional practice of Samoan tātatau and how this has resulted in the resistance amongst individualistic perspectives. In ‘A history of Samoan tattooing’, Samoan author Sean Mallon provides an insight into the history of Samoan tātatau as well as traditional customs involved. Mallon also presents ideas around how traditional Samoan tātatau has informed the continuous evolution of contemporary Samoan tatau. The many changes in traditional Samoan tātatau is not only noted in Mallon’s ‘A history of Samoan tattooing’ but also in Adams books ‘Tatau: Samoan Tattoo, New Zealand Art, Global culture’ and ‘tatau’. The most outstanding representation of defiance amongst these texts is the traditional marking (tattooing) of non-Samoans. An outstanding change is seen

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<sup>32</sup> Wendt, *Tattooing the Post-colonial body*. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Wendt, *Tattooing the Post-colonial body*. 2.

from the receiver of the tātatau, with non-Samoan people receiving traditional Samoan tatau from Samoan tātatau practitioners.



*Figure 6. Photograph by Adams showing non-Samoan Tatau*

The traditional marking of non-Samoans breaches any normality of the traditional practice, forming grey areas of the vā. In Adams 'Tatau - photographs by Mark Adams' strong images inform the idea of defiance and individualism within contemporary Samoan tātatau. These images highlight the discomfort and confrontation one may experience when seeing these bold images of non-Samoans with traditional Samoan tātatau. Adams describes these images, saying "...despite their virtuosity, the images exude a certain discomfort with the business of cross-cultural image-making, with its histories and with New Zealand's culture and politics".

In this chapter, I examine grey areas of the vā during the tātatau practice for a Samoan female: the malu applied on my body.

The grey areas of the vā when gifting of Malu

Going into this experience of receiving the malu did come with the sense of displacement. As stated before, my struggles with my Samoan identity and 'worthiness' blurred the possibility of receiving the malu. Two main outcomes that created new spatial realities resulted from these feelings of

cultural displacement firstly, the importance of female presence and secondly, the 'secludedness' of the whole event.

The importance of female presence was a priority from the start. Traditionally, the tufuga (tattooist) and toso's (stretchers/the tufuga's team) would be an all-male team. My mother set out to seek a female tufuga. Without planning it, the tufuga's only male toso (who was also the head toso of the team and the tufuga's advisor) became unavailable. This resulted in the female tufuga moving forward with an all-female toso team.

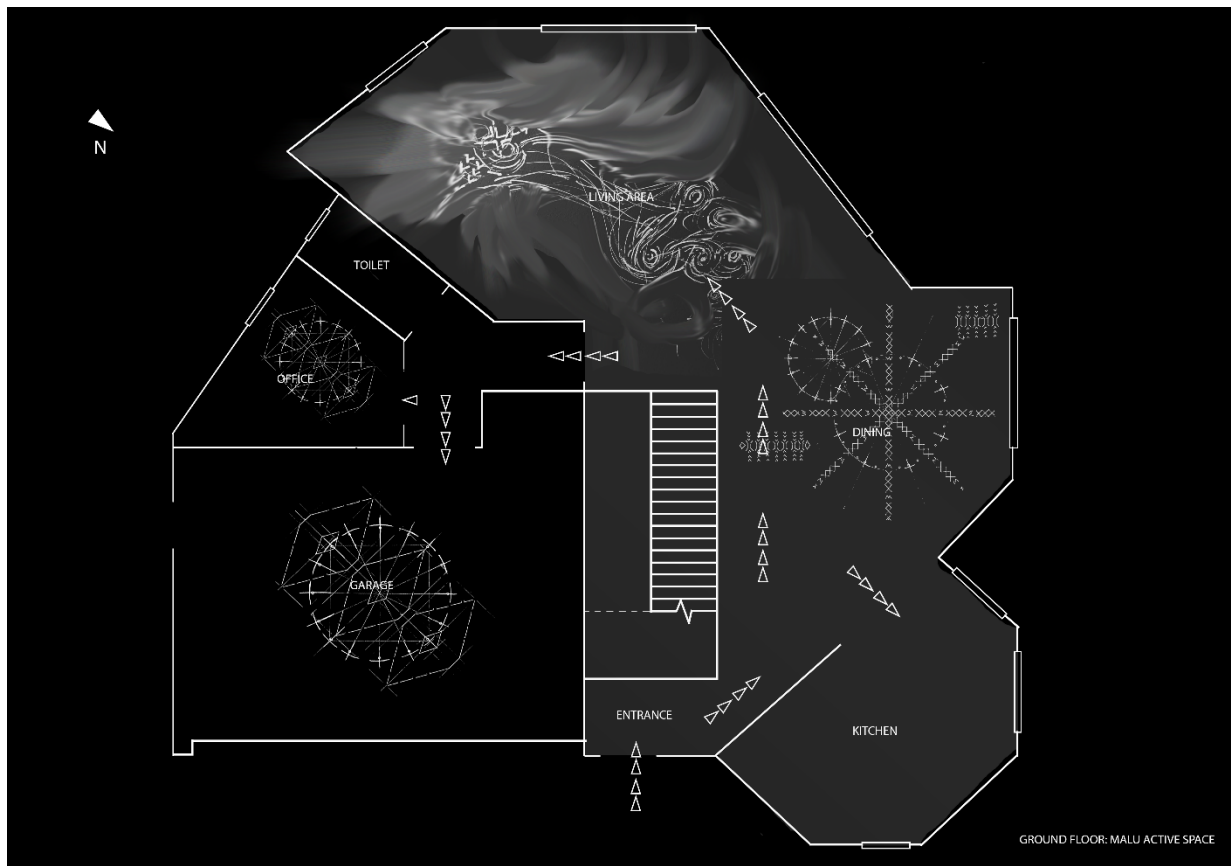


Figure 7. Diagram of transformed domestic realm when the malu is being gifted in the fale.

This was important to my mother, my sisters, and my aunts who were also receiving the malu alongside myself. When the tātatau practice is in session, it is obvious how intimate the tufuga and toso's are one's body. They push up against you, move your legs, push up against your private areas to get into their needed positions. The whole lower body feels exposed and vulnerable to their hands and tools. So, imagine this with the usual male tufuga and male toso team. Practicing tatau is an intimate experience. Although it is not considered intrusive to conduct the malu with a male tufuga and toso. However, being comfortable within this physical experience could be considered an improvement for females when performing the malu on my body. Although Samoan tātatau practices are dominated by male tufuga, we were fortunate to have the only New Zealand Samoan

female Tufuga joined by her all-female team practicing the tatau with the au (traditional Samoan tattoo tool).



Figure 8. Tufuga and toso's gifting the malu to me.

Thus, the grey area of the vā is represented by the female presence within this space. The vā generated from this innovation in tatau offers a feminine, safe environment for the gifting and receiving of the malu to Samoan women in the diaspora. The aura of the grey area of the vā is what I express:

*On the day of receiving the la'ei, I had already experienced my first 'gifting of the la'ei' to my Aunty as a Tapua'i. So I had an idea of what the environment would be like and had already settled amongst the crowd. I woke up and got ready before people started arriving, and prepped my mind for the day ahead. A day of unknown physical pain, the arrival of tucked away fear, people that I love as my Tapua'i, my mum, my lost loved ones, Dad. At ease was the state of mind with peace and grief as the emotions I could feel swelling in my body. People started arriving. But it wasn't till the Tufuga and her team of Toso's arrived that it started to sink in that I was receiving the la'ei. The tufuga and her team started prepping and I was just sitting far away in my own little corner trying to muster up focus and maintain the calm state I was in. The time came for loku to begin.*

*Everyone sat with backs against that wall, all wearing an i'e lavalava, legs crossed and in a circle with me in a place that was visible for everyone to see me. I sat next to my Aunty who was facilitating the loku so she could also pray over me for the day. Once this concluded, the Tufuga then started marking my legs.*

*As the Tufuga marked my legs for guidance lines for the la'ei, I became aware of where everyone was situated within the space. The circle for the loku was now broken. The Tufuga was situated with her back against the wall because no one was allowed to be behind her and her au. The Tapua'i was sitting, legs folded, looking onto the Tufuga marking me. Once the Tufuga was done marking me, she was ready to start. I laid down and played one of my Dad's favourite songs, Marc Broussard - Cry to me. The emotions blurred the pain of the first few hits from the au. I cried, but not from the pain of the au, but from the known fact that my Dad was not there. My family surrounded me, following me with their tears of the same realisation. As the song faded out, and the many songs followed, the physical pain started creeping in. however, a calmness came over me and I kept reminding myself of the advice I received from my Tufuga and Aunty who had just received the la'ei - 'lean into the pain, if you fight it, reject any negative energy, you will suffer'. What was once pain was now new found peace and high focus of breathing.*

*As the hours went by, the many bodies of the Tapua'i rotated around me. Faces that have seen the best and worst of me sat legs folded around me. My aunties, uncles, cousins, friends, siblings, Mum. half of my first leg was done - break time. As the Tufuga and the Toso's relaxed in their fierce positions, I slowly rose from my half-asleep-state-of-mind state and took my first look at my new markings. The clean, fine cuts lined with ink.*

*"Beautiful Tyla", I said to Tufuga. She smiled, "Malo Lena".*

*We continued on the second half of the first leg. This involved what was said to be the most painful part, the marking of the knee. I wouldn't let my focus be altered, and because of this I knew my tolerance was fine. The marking of the first leg concluded, and I stood in awe of the artistry of the Tufuga, grateful that I am a recipient of such beautiful markings. We broke off for lunch, and in the midst of the conversations between my family, friends, Tufuga and team, I could not help but stare at the markings I now wear. 'It's possible, I can finish this', I thought to myself. During lunch, the space became noa, and the rules of the va within the space of gifting, was now suspended for the moment being. Once lunch concluded, the va of marking was then activated.*

*It was interesting to observe how comfortable the Tufuga and her team were. I could not help but suspect if this was due to the space being for women, a safe space for us to be ourselves without the constraints of dominant male assertions. The Tufuga even confessed that she felt a greater sense of artistic freedom because she wasn't under the usual supervision of her sub-mentor (who is male).*

*We then entered the second half of the gifting and began on my unmarked leg. Thinking that I had gone through the first leg with reasonable ease, I began with the stance that I would be okay. However, for some reason, the pain felt worse when the au made its first strike on the unmarked leg.*

*The ending was in sight and I could feel my body starting to shiver as my body started to respond to the physical trauma. My mum by my side, whose hand I used in a 'stress ball' fashion each time my mind allowed the presence of pain. My other hand clutching on the only physical representation I had of my Dad - his faithful*

*handkerchief. Eyes closed, I would listen to the tapping of the au, the smell of roasted chops being made in the kitchen for dinner, the laughter of my friends and family, "malo le onasa'i lena " would occasionally be uttered by the Tapua'i.*

*Finally, the moment arrived and the Tufuga took her last strike. "Malo Lena", the Tufuga said as she wiped the excess ink away from fresh marks. I slowly rose from my trance of intense focus and felt released of the physically 'hard-part' of this journey. I stared. Stared at the marks that were given to me. The fine, detailed artistry of the Tufuga. "Beautiful Tyla, thank you" I whispered to the Tufuga, loud enough only for her hearing. I thanked the team and then stood to thank the Tapua'i, in which I was greeted with cheering and applause of pride and joy. My eyes started to swell as I saw my Mum smiling with tears of joy streaming down her face. At that moment I pictured Dad right beside her, smiling back at me and expressing his usual cheeky remark, 'not bad aye'.*

*Hugs and kisses all around, grateful for each soul I embraced for supporting me in that space. We broke for dinner, and enjoyed each other's company till the body clock called for our rest.*

*Journal Entry, Elena, 2022*

The other grey area of my tatau event was the "secludedness" of the whole event. Usually, the receiving of the malu is celebrated publically, and usually within New Zealand these big celebrations



*Figure 9. Completed Malu on me*



are held equally for the Tufuga and the receivers of the tatau. For myself, along with the others that were recipients of the malu, we felt no need to have a big celebration. The collective agreement to privatise this event would not only help us navigate this space comfortably, but it also states that being a proud Samoan is not loud and boastful, but our Samoan identities reside within ourselves, within our vā, although non-traditional and grey, with others in the Samoan diaspora.

The malu on me

*Now you have these markings aye. A starting point. Now colour them in with your breath, and shade with your learnings. Nothing left unmarked.*

*Journal Entry, Elena, 2022.*

Throughout this research journey, I have struggled to come to an architectural resolution for a concept that is mostly intangible, and heavily based on human behaviour and interaction. Understanding how to design a building for the vā, to shape walls that represent vā, has had me in a bind for the majority of this research! However, Albert Refiti address's this thought in *Mavae and Tofiga - Spatial Exposition of the Samoan Cosmogony and Architecture* by saying:

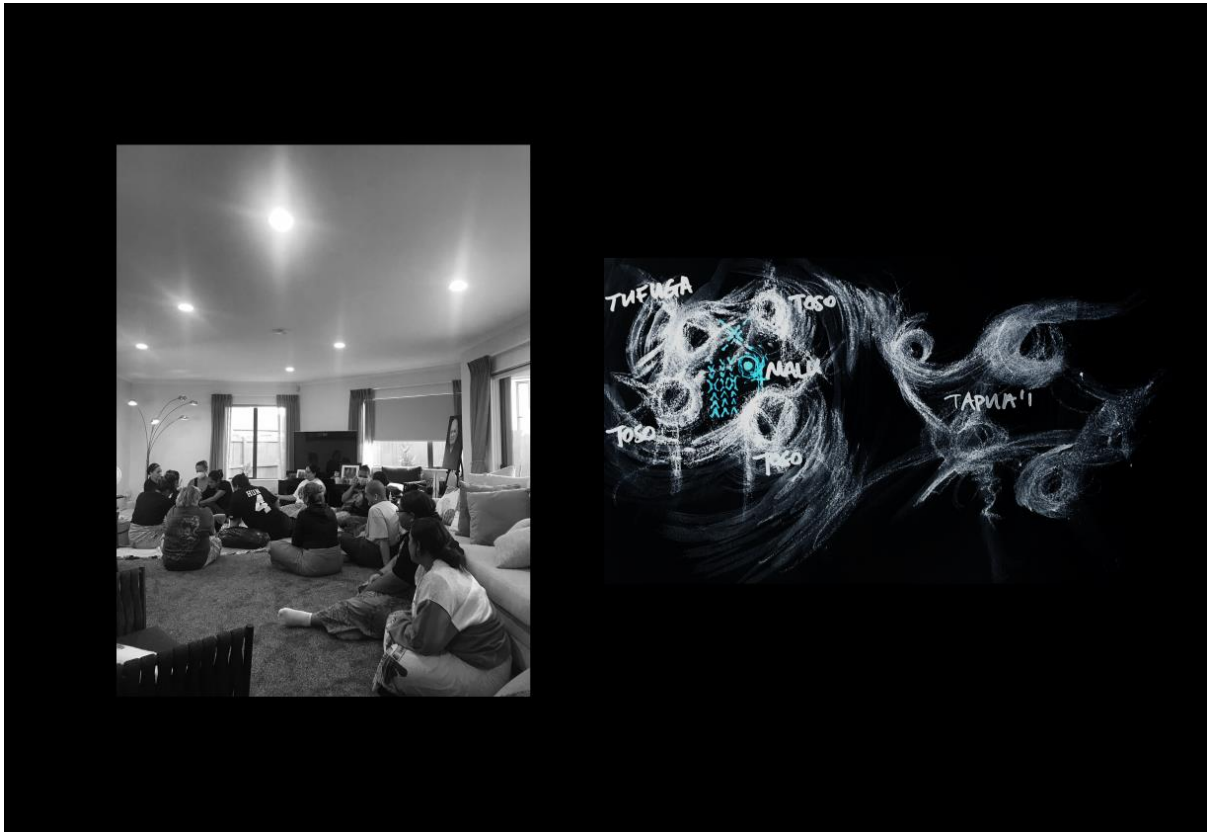
This study concerns the question of space as constructed and organised by people. This requires a consideration of aspects of anthropology (and, to some extent, philosophy) to identify the forms and structures that give rise to space and architecture in the Samoan context. Further, almost all of the available historical sources and data on Samoan and Pacific architecture are from ethnography and anthropology. A tension, between the desire to institute an anthropology that gives rise to architecture, on one hand, and an architecture that gives rise to anthropology, on the other, is at heart of the thesis and remains partially unresolved. This relational tension, however, helps reveal certain overlaps between anthropology and architecture. Anthropology may therefore clarify or undermine architectural concepts and questions (and vice versa) and identify the emergent in reality by “decipher[ing] patterns in the making.”<sup>34</sup>

To some extent, the vā would never take its place as being a tangible being. As stated, it is a live entity that can be activated. Whilst analysing the space in which the gifting of the malu took place, spatial diagrams were made to visualise the transitions and movement of the va within the space.

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<sup>34</sup> Refiti, *Mavae and Tofiga – spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony and architecture*, 27.





*Figure 10. Malu room space.*

Figure 10 is of the spatial diagram for the 'Malu room space'. The gestural strokes represent the active feminine energy within the grey space of the va. As you move gradually across the right of the diagram, the strokes begin to slowly distance themselves apart, symbolising the gradual decline of intensity of the female energy. The aqua tatau markings represent me being marked.



Figure 11. Samaga space.

Figure 11 is a spatial diagram showing the 'Samaga space'. This space was a ceremony that lifted the 'tapu' off of our malu's. Although it was a traditional ceremony, a moment of an unconventional action occurred. The receivers of the Malu were asked to speak and share their experience, which is not done within the traditional Samaga ceremony. Again, the curvy gestural strokes represent the active feminine energy of the grey area of the va. Only this time, it is transferred outwards as the 'tapu' was lifted.

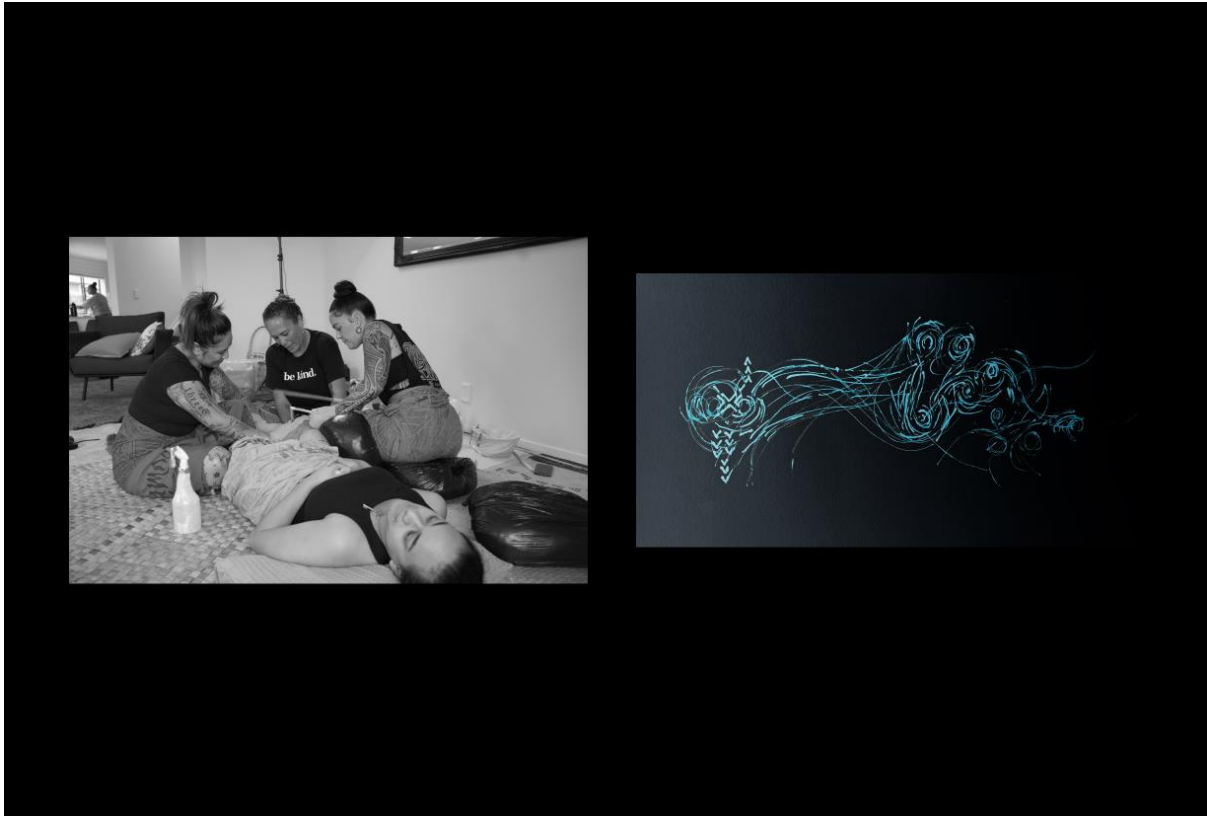


Figure 12. Feminine vā

Figure 12 is a spatial diagram that represents the pure feminine vā, with the curvaceous feminine strokes.

Juhani Pallasmaa states in *The eyes of the skin*:

*‘To at least some extent every place can be remembered, partly because it is unique, but partly because it has affected our bodies and generated enough associations to hold it in our personal worlds.*

This embodied experience and Juhani’s words helped inform the idea that my site was to exist within a metaphysical realm. A way in which I started to map out the site was using malu iconography that was specific to my la’ei that I had received and implementing hints of the fale Samoa plan view within these Iconography map drawings. The icons or motifs are not just any pattern, they each have a meaning specific to the giver and the receiver. The definitions of the icons help identify the metaphysics of the site. For example, Fa’atualoa - the centipede - is a symbol of strength and commitment to family. The centipede is a belief that helps draw boundaries within the metaphysical site. I believe that the iconography that I wear today is the language of the ‘Mauli’ of my Tufuga. An expression within the vā from one

Samoan to another. The existing surroundings take the form of the evolving self. The idea that the vā fluctuates to fit the scale of the individual.

In these images you see how the La’ei icons that withhold its traditional vā existing on an individual with a fluctuating identity. These identities are crafted by the mould of being a New Zealand born Samoan who code switches for survival. The underlying marks of origin are continuous throughout. The hints of instability of identity amongst NZ born Samoan’s create the idea of displacement. These images represent the displacement of self and the ‘personal worlds’ Juhani mentioned.



Figure 13. Original photo of code switch part one



Figure 14. Original photo of code switch part two

In summary, the indigenous practice of Samoan tatau has offered insight into a vā that is intergenerational and transferred through the Samoan peoples. Over time, it has transformed in many ways. But not only has the practice itself evolved, but it also can influence and transform its recipients. In the face of displacement of the vā, the parties involved influenced the existing vā to mitigate this displacement, resulting in the outcome of two new spatial realities - the importance of female presence and the “secludedness” of the Malu event. These new spatial realities represent the ‘grey area’ of the vā of which these Samoan individuals authentically expressed themselves within.

# Chapter four

## Weaving and clashing

*Now, you are here. Left with a marked body inside and out. The plans are drawn, outlined through your veins. Sections of your life taken into full render of examination.*

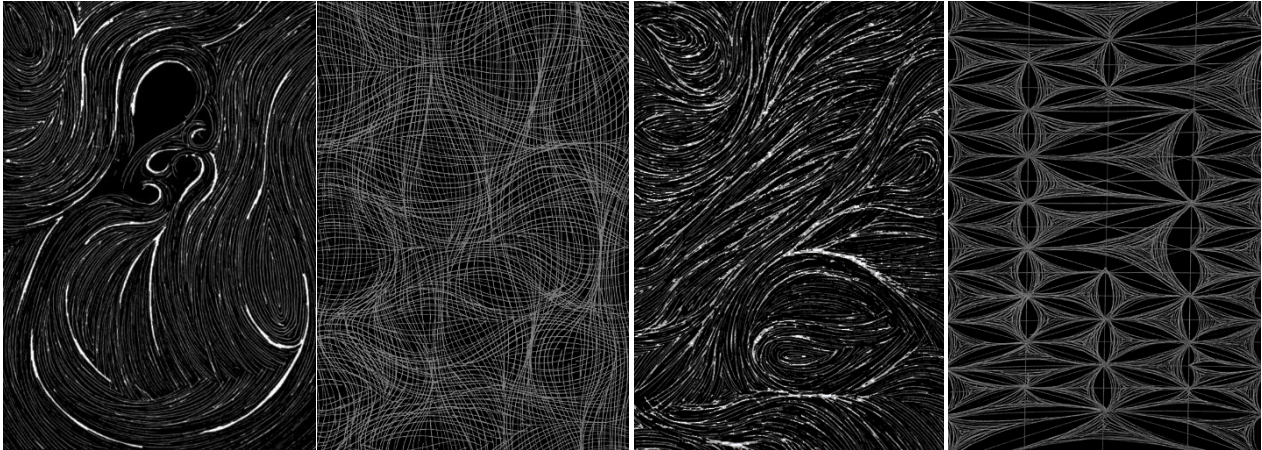
*Now you are here. Left with a marked mind inside and out. Modelled into being tossed between two worlds. With each toss applying moulding pressure.*

*Now you are here. Left with a marked heart inside and out. Siting the beats of your foundation, unable to sense the unknown remnants of the underground.*

*Now you are here, now you are here.*

*Journal Entry, Elena, 2022.*

Throughout this research thus far, a commonality that occurs is the Samoan body. The physical, mental, and spiritual elements of the body are all affected by the *vā* and furthermore, the ‘grey areas’ of the *vā*. For this research, an architectural response will be made using my body. My body has experienced the pain, joy, trauma, implications of self-identity, it just makes sense.



*Figure 15, 16, 17, 18. Diagrams showing *vā* being interrogated by displacement.*

The displacement that occurred during my father’s passing was the fact that I had become a daughter without a father, my mother without her husband, my grandparents without their son. The displacement of grief and a *vā* that was lost. Through these diagram sketches, I wanted to portray how the *vā* is being interrogated by this displacement through line vibrations, influenced curves and pinched moments, whilst asking myself, “How can this translate architecturally? Is it already architecturalised to its full capacity? How do you imagine and create the tangible for intangible architectural language?”



The malu being gifted to my skin within my lounge and my father's body and his last days on earth residing in my lounge, both occurring within the domestic realm. And with the displacement occurring within these spaces, the grey area of the vā started to evolve amongst those involved. The grey area resulted in adaptation to create new spatial realities that did not conform to traditional Samoan customs or rituals.

However, the domestic realm was too limiting for a site for an architectural response. Although these events took place in this realm, the impact it has on the skin, the spirit, the vā within, is transported to wherever I go. Juhani Pallasmaa's quote articulates this point, saying,

To at least some extent every place can be remembered, partly because it is unique, but partly because it has affected our bodies and generated enough associations to hold it in our personal worlds.<sup>35</sup>

During conversations with other Samoans from different walks of life, it became evident that the architecture they see for themselves is within their own body. Where they go, their residency follows, their safe place within, the vā that burns for them only. For the malu, I wear it wherever I go, shown or not it is now part of my tangible being - this is my extension of the domestic realm. For my father's passing, grief will always linger within, but the tangible extension has resulted in where my dad lays today - the memorial gardens cemetery - another extension of the domestic realm.



Figure 19. Samuelu Folau resting place at the memorial garden cemetery.

<sup>35</sup> Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin*, 8.



Figure 20, 21. Family visits to the manukau memorial gardens

These photos show how families and friends occupy this space, through simple seating. Visitation at the tugamau is nothing more than just hanging out with loved ones in the presence of the lost loved one. Which leads to the notion, ‘why not make a hang out area that houses the grieving architecture temporarily’, for when their body leaves the tugamau, so does their architecture’. A temporary structure that provides shelter and seating.



Figure 22. Final design proposal, the architectural response, render one. Showing visitation at the manukau memorial gardens

This structure is made of motor controlled grouped trusses. All gathered at one end of the plot lines, the trusses can be transported in small groups of three across on tracks to the plot of the visitor. For moments in which there is a party of visitors, the trusses can be latched onto each other, creating a more suitable sized temporary structure. The structure itself is inspired by the fale tele interior roof structure, enclosed by polycarbonate roofing with the texture like our “skin”. A structure that



portrays the idea of temporal travelling, that acts as an assist in the navigation of the grey area of the vā for the visitor or the architecture.



Figure 23. Final design proposal, the architectural response, render two. Showing visitation at the manukau memorial gardens.

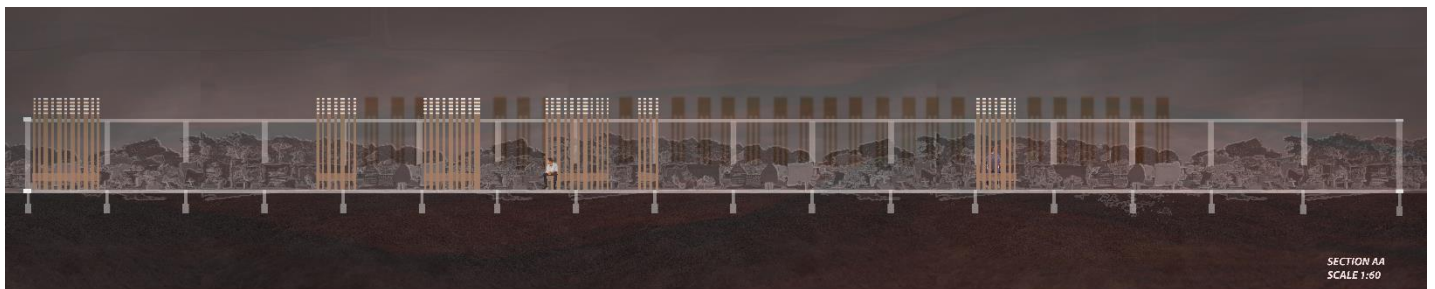
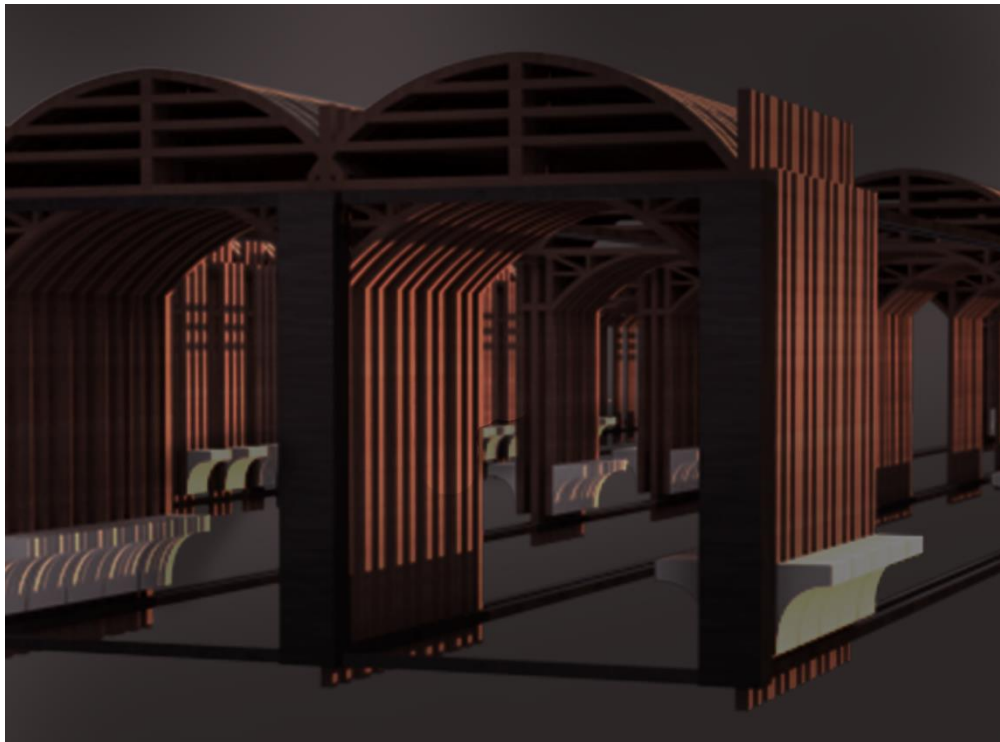
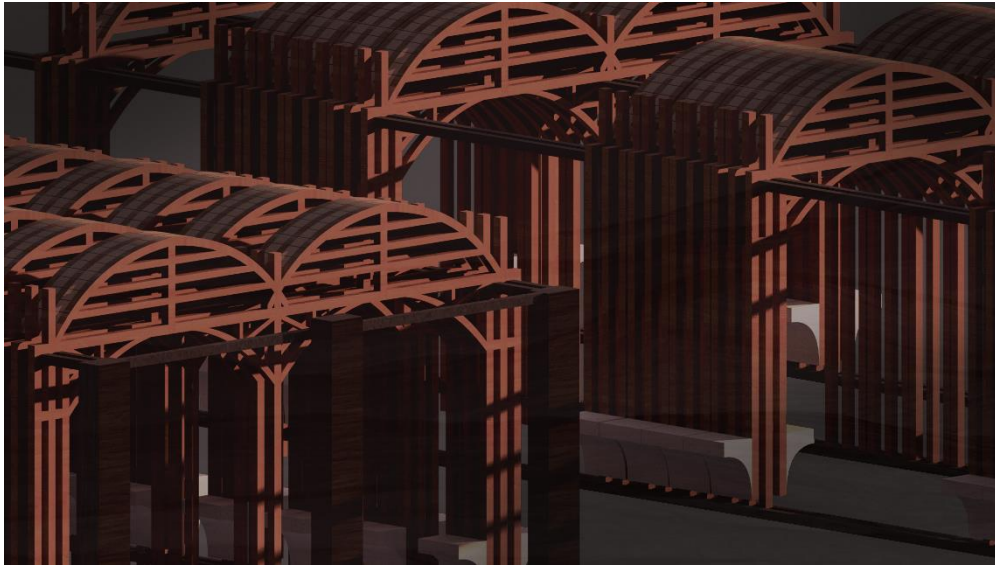


Figure 24. Final design proposal, the architectural response, section AA. Scale 1:60 @ A2.





Figure 25. Final design proposal, the architectural response, site plan. Scale 1:250 @A1. Showing the highlighted area of the memorial gardens of which, the structure resides.



*Figure 26, 27. Final design proposal, the architectural response, site plan. Structural renders.*

Understanding the mauli (inner essence) of Samoan people within the grey area of the vā is a trip of time travelling. A constant flow that evolves. However, the gems of the mauli that have been seen are evident in how we are aware of ourselves within the grey area. Resulting in a time loop of discoveries.

## Fleshing of the vā

Efi explains the harmony of a Samoan body, specifically expanding on the Samoan indigenous understanding of the body, saying:

In the Samoan indigenous religion there are three key parts to a person or self: the tino or body, the mafaufau or mind and the agaga or soul. Harmony with the self requires harmony in the body, the mind and most importantly the soul.<sup>36</sup>

I recognise that the Samoan indigenous understanding of the harmony of a Samoan body is important to note as it has a significant influence of the understanding of mauli, and subsequently, the grey area of vā. Efi explains,

The soul, which in Samoan is the agaga or mauli, resides between the heart (or fatu) and the lungs (or māmā). The significance of this is that the heart represents God as the prime mover, who provides rhythm and life to the mind and body, whilst the lungs are the custodians of the breath of life. When Samoans want to establish death in the body it is the heart that they first consult.<sup>37</sup>

Recognising that the mauli is part of an organic harmony is important in fleshing out the functionalities and details of the grey area of vā for a Samoan person. Throughout this thesis I have examined the mauli of Samoan people residing in Auckland, and how the mauli conducts the grey area of vā. My architectural response of a temporary structure at the Manukau memorial gardens represents architecture that is a product of the grey area of vā. It is a structure that houses the harmonies at play between the anapogi (prayer and meditation) and moe manatunatu (dream dialogue with ancestors and family gods) of the mauli. A simple architectural structure at most, but a vessel to navigate the grey area of vā.

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<sup>36</sup> Efi, *In search of harmony: Peace in the Samoan indigenous religion*, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Efi, *In search of harmony: Peace in the Samoan indigenous religion*, 13.

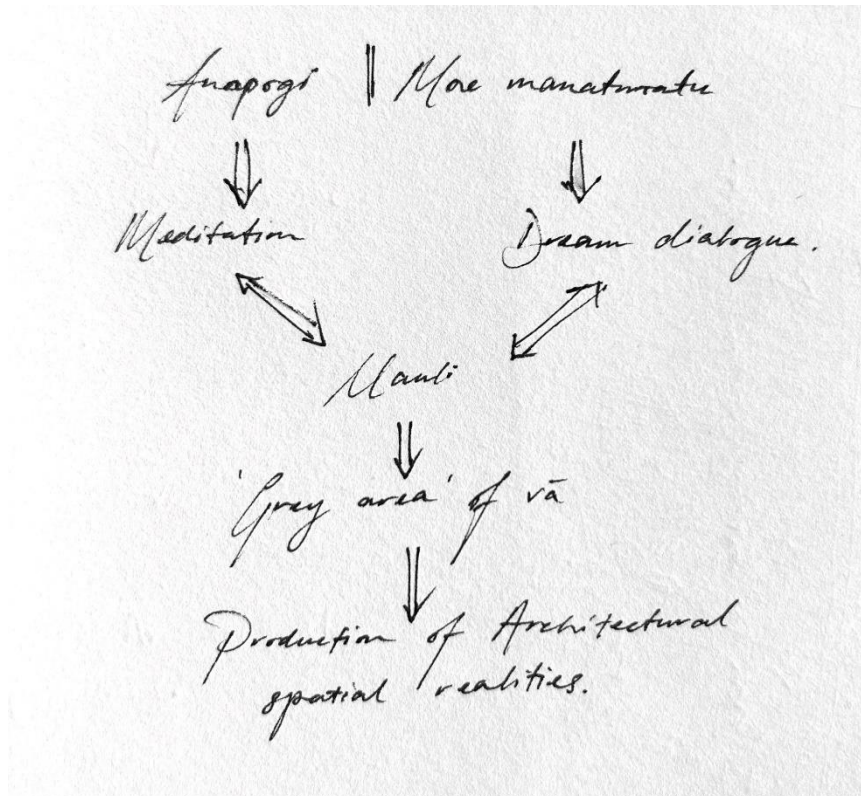


Figure 28. Mind map noting the intersections of the main concepts of this thesis.

# Conclusion

Navigating the multifaceted Pasifika-identity within Auckland New Zealand is an endless journey of growth and development, a process that will never cease. And naturally, along the way, new elements of the moana origins will be tested, construed, and reconstructed to suit the evolving Samoan being. As stated before, a Samoan indigenous understanding of harmony of a Samoan body is important to note. According to Efi, the harmony of the Samoan body refers to the three key parts of a person – tino (body), mafaufau (mind) and agaga/mauli (soul). Maui being a core concept for this thesis, recognising the balance of the two forces of mauli. Anapogi (prayer and meditation) and moe manatunatu (dream dialogue with ancestors and family gods) and how these two forces feed the soul - the mauli of a Samoan being in Auckland.

From these Samoan identities within Auckland, an unravelling of nuanced layered spaces come to the forefront, where the traditional ways of vā (vā within fa'asamoa) is adapted for a contemporary vā (the grey area of vā).

To understand the grey area of vā, an examination of what/who conducts vā took place. The conductors being Samoan people residing in Auckland New Zealand. Through the element of displacement that causes imbalance for the mauli of Samoan people into Aotearoa, grey areas of vā are created for generations (and continue to), causing an alteration of traditions and normality amongst Samoan people. The grey area of vā is where architecture is created. Spatial realities that require adaptation and resolutions that fall outside of the traditional ways of vā, the grey area is where, architecturally, the multifaceted Samoan identity within Auckland is curated. A building/structure is indeed a bridging between what is held within the tangible space, and the metaphysical realm of the space.

The need for tangibility of architecture is nullified by the presence of the grey area of vā. It is a belief within this thesis that the grey area of vā curated by the mauli of Samoan people in Auckland is architecture. The spatial realities of the metaphysical realm are the walls that bridge our tino (body), mafaufau (mind), and mauli (soul) to the physical realm, resulting in Samoan architecture as an expression of Samoan people that doesn't reside within tangibility, but within relational spatial constructs.



*Figure 29. Final design critique presentation.*



# Glossary

Agaga – soul.

Atua – god.

Anapogoi - A ritual of self-denial, entailing on self-isolation from the village and meditating for spiritual insight.

Aiga – family.

Fa'alavelave – support typically shown through gifting.

Faletele - chiefly meeting house or the guesthouse.

Fa'asamoa - traditional Samoan way.

Fa'afafine – third gender.

Fa'amatama – third gender.

Fale afolau – house for family living.

Fale – house.

Fa'atualoa – the centipede tatau symbol.

I'e lavalava – Samoan garment worn to cover the lower body.

Loku – worship.

Matai – Samoan chief title.

Malaga – Travelling.

Moe Manatunatu - dream dialogue with ancestors and family gods available to, depending on the spiritual levels attained in their processes of anapogi.

Mauli - refers to one's soul or spiritual essence and is defined in this thesis as the inner essence.

Malae - open area often found in front of the faletele.

Mana – impersonal supernatural power which can be transmitted or inherited.

Malu/la'ei - a traditional Samoan Tātatau for females.

Maliu – funeral.

Mafaufau – mind.

Papalagi – Non-Samoans.

Saofa'l – Samoan ceremony when one receives a Chief title.

Soa – tatau partner.

Samaga – traditional Samoan ceremony that takes place when the malu is completed.

Teu le vā – to nurture the relationship.

Tautala – lecture/uttering.

Takatapui – maori word for queer people.

Tufuga fai fale - traditional Samoan master builder.

Tu'ugamau – grave site.

Tātatau/tatau – Samoan tattoo.

Tufuga tātatau – tattooist.

Toso – team of the tufuga tātatau, the 'skin stretchers'.

Tapua'i – group of supporting people.

Tapu – sacred.

Tino – body.

Vā – Samoan construct that navigates relational spatial realities of people.

Vā fetu - space between two stars as well as the space shared (in)between queer Pasifika family members.



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